

## **State of Connecticut**

**African-American Affairs Commission**

**State Capitol**

**210 Capitol Avenue – Room 509**

**Hartford, CT 06106**

**860-240-8555**

March 19, 2010

Judiciary Committee

Testimony of Glenn A. Cassis, Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission

**Raised H.B. 5521 – AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND ERASURE OF JUVENILE RECORDS**

Good Morning members of the Joint Judiciary Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis, Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission represents a voice for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis and outreach. I am testifying in support HB 5521.

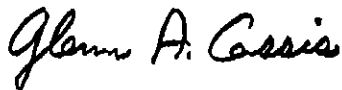
The Commission is very concerned about the racial disparities that exist through out the State of Connecticut. We continue to support policy and legislation that strives to eliminate the disparities that prevent African-Americans from being productive contributors to the State's growth and development. It is apparent to the Commission that HB 5521 can improve the opportunities for children of color and we vigorously support this legislation.

The AAAC has been a member of the Commission on Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System so we have knowledge of many of the issues. I have listened carefully to representatives from law enforcement, the public defenders office, the judicial branch, child welfare/advocate, citizens, etc. and have an appreciation for the complexity of the issue of racial disparities in the justice system. National and state studies illustrate that African-American and juveniles of color receive disproportionate treatment in arrests and detention than their white peers. The evidence is undisputable. The requirement for police officers to obtain a court order before a youth could be transported to a detention center would provide an additional set of eyes to review actions before a serious decision is made. When Connecticut law changed to require the court to approve detention

for non-serious juvenile offenses, studies show that there was a significant decrease in the disproportionate rate of minority contact in the juvenile justice system. By requiring a court order before admission to detention centers for serious juvenile offenses, studies support that the disproportionate rate, which is 2 ½ higher for minorities, would also decrease. This is a step worth implementing since it would correct a grave injustice.

The other important section of the bill that the AAAC strongly supports is the erasure of juvenile records. The provisions as outlined – at least two years elapsed from the date of discharge, no subsequent criminal proceedings, no convictions in two years – should earn juveniles the opportunity to become productive members of society. This provision would remove barriers preventing juveniles from continuing their education or obtaining employment in their adult years. They would not be unfairly labeled especially since they would have demonstrated their remorse and have taken actions to become law abiding. This provision would be the most important action to keep juveniles from returning to the criminal justice system. This would have the same positive results as pardons have for adults. We must do all we can to demonstrate to juveniles that second chances should be earned, are valued and can provide a real opportunity.

In conclusion, the African-American Affairs Commission supports Raised HB 5521 and recommends swift passage. Thank you for accepting my testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn A. Cassis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Glenn A. Cassis  
Executive Director